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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

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Housekeepers' Chat, Fri., Dec. 16/27

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Meals for the Finicky Child." Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

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Today I'm going to tell you the story of Finicky Florine -- a little girl who decided, all of a sudden, that she didn't like a single food that grown-up people said was "good for her." Just mention carrots, and she'd smile a cynical smile. Mention spinach, and Florine would stick out her tongue at you. And onions -- she hated them. She had to be coaxed to drink milk, and bribed to eat eggs, and -- this is the saddest part of the story -- Florine's father used to spank her, when she wouldn't eat the lettuce, in her salad.

In short, Florine was well started on the way to poor health, nervousness, and all sorts of dreadful disorders, when her grandmother came to visit her. Now Florine's grandmother was a very wise woman. She knew that every child feeding problem can be solved, by one method or another, if you have enough patience, understanding, and ingenuity. For instance, the first time that Florine refused to eat what was served her, her grandmother let her go to bed without any dinner.

"No healthy child will be starved, or become malnourished, because she is allowed to go hungry for a meal or so," said Florine's grandmother. "In fact, if missing one meal won't show Florine that I am in earnest, she may miss a few more." But Florine appeared at the dinner table, and ate what was served her. No mention was made of the unpleasant experience of the night before; it never helps to "rub it in", when dealing with a child.

Of course Florine's grandmother knew that "starving" will not always work with a child. Active, healthy little children have every reason to be hungry at mealtime, and as a rule they greet their food with joy. Lack of appetite may be due to over-fatigue, or some other bad physical condition, or to not enough active play out of doors. Sometimes the explanation is even simpler -- nibbling between meals. Even the child who does not have ice cream cones, or candy bars, at odd times, may be taking the edge off his appetite by eating wholesome food, at a time when his stomach should be resting. Some children may need an extra lunch, but if so, the food should be given at a regular time, rather than as a "piece."

When Florine's grandmother found that the neighbors had been giving the child candy and cookies and cake, between meals, she put a stop to that. No more did Florine buy ice-cream cones, when the Ice-Cream Man rang his tantalizing little bell.

"If parents would only realize," Florine's grandmother told me, "that all of this eating business is so much a matter of habit, they would see to it that

only the right habits have a chance to start. By the time the baby is weaned, he should have become acquainted with such a wide variety of fruit, vegetable, and cereal flavors, that adding new ones occasionally would be no trick at all. The trouble is, that mothers often are discouraged, early in the game, when the baby spits out first tastes, and perhaps makes faces. This is a perfectly normal response to the new food, simply because it is new. Older children, too, and even adults, often have to become accustomed to something they have not tasted before. It feels strange on the tongue; it may be warmer, colder, or coarser than the accustomed food; it is different, but that does not make it distasteful. Distaste or dislike usually comes under the influence of bad example, or unfavorable suggestion. Often a child is unintentionally encouraged into a dislike by the mother who is prejudiced against the spinach that she is feeding him. Her aversion is strong enough to carry over to the baby, though he is still too young to be aware of what is happening. The slightly older child, proud to be just like daddy, imitates the bad example of his elder, and mimics his father's dislikes.

"Of course, some food prejudices begin in other ways. The food may have been offered when the child was ill, angry, frightened, or otherwise emotionally upset. Perhaps he has unconsciously linked in his mind the flavor of some distasteful medicine with that of the food he is refusing. It is very helpful to trace out these associations of ideas, and experiences, wherever possible, because it is easier for parents to undo a bad habit, when they understand how it began."

I agreed with everything Florine's grandmother said, because I know she has made a special study of children's food habits. When she undertook to make Florine over into a model child, she enlisted the help of the child's parents. She asked them to set a good example, at the table, not to talk about how much they disliked this and that and the other food.

She took special pains to cook meals that Florine would like. For instance, the day I visited her, she had a delicious dinner -- take your pencils, and I'll tell you what she had -- Chicken Casserole with Vegetables; Baked Potatoes; Tomato Aspic Salad with Toasted Cheese Crackers; Ice Cream with Honey-Nut Sauce; and Scotch Wafers.

Did I say that Finicky Florine didn't like carrots and onions? She changed her mind, when they were cooked in casserole, with the chicken. She ate carrots and onions without even thinking about what she was eating. She had said that she didn't like baked potatoes, too, but the gravy from the casserole chicken was such a pleasing addition to the baked potatoes, that Florine ate one potato, and asked for another. She got the wishbone in her serving of chicken, too, and that made her happy for the rest of the day. I have an idea, just between you and me, that Florine's grandmother was responsible for Florine getting the wishbone -- she knows how to make children happy.

Well, let me see -- what else was done for Florine? Oh yes, the Tomato Aspic Salad was served in such a cunning little mold that the child forgot all about the lettuce underneath it, and ate every bit of her salad.

The ice-cream made a special hit of course. It had Honey-Nut Sauce on it. A sauce made of strained honey, with a few chopped nuts in it. You know -- something like an ice cream sundae. Of course Florine got only about a spoonful of this sweet sauce, but that was enough to satisfy her, after the wholesome meat and vegetables she had eaten.

Florine didn't know that the Scotch Wafers were made especially on her account. Scotch Wafers are crisp, and afford good exercise for a youngster's teeth. They are not too rich, to be good for a child. The recipe for Scotch Wafers is in the cookbook, but in case you don't have the book I'll give you the recipe, in just a minute. Let's repeat the menu, first: Chicken Casserole with Vegetables -- by the way, that's a dandy way to cook an old bird, which requires long, slow cooking. The recipe for Chicken Casserole is in the Cookbook. But I'm getting off the track. Start over again, please, with the menu: Chicken Casserole with Vegetables; Baked Potatoes; Tomato Aspic Salad with Toasted Cheese Crackers; Ice Cream with Honey-Nut Sauce; and Scotch Wafers.

I really ought to say something more about Florine, to bring my story to a close, and show you that she is now a model child. You don't need to take my word for it -- her father and mother think she is the best child in the neighborhood -- her grandmother goes further than that -- and says Florine is the smartest and the prettiest child in the state -- so she must be.

Here's the recipe for Scotch Wafers -- before I forget it:

2 cups rolled oats
1 cup wheat flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt.
2 teaspoons baking powder
3 tablespoons fat, and
1/3 cup milk.

Seven ingredients for Scotch Wafers. Perhaps I'd better repeat them: (Repeat).

Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl, add the fat, and mix together thoroughly. Add enough milk to make a dough sufficiently hard to roll (about 1/3 of a cup). Knead this dough well; roll very thin, and cut with a biscuit cutter. Bake in a moderately hot oven. When cool, the wafers should be very crisp. Raisins may be added. In that case chop them very fine, and if necessary, use a little more flour in rolling out the wafers.

That's all -- till Monday. Another menu then.